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Sustainable-responsible tourism discourse – Towards 'responsustable' tourism

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ABSTRACT

Despite several decades of academic and practical debate on tourism sustainability, its application in practice remains difficult. The dominant tourism discourse on *sustainability* (theory, seen as a concept) and *responsibility* (practice, understood as appropriate action) calls for a solid understanding of the process of how a responsible destination actually implements a sustainability agenda, which this paper aims to provide. In this context, we explore theoretical perspectives from political economics and behavioural economics to offer a well-reasoned integrated sustainability–responsibility model comprising three stages: Awareness, Agenda and Action. This Triple-A Model complements the sustainability indicators debate and provides advice on how to continuously implement the sustainability concept and move from market-value-led and environmentally laissez-faire tourism towards more environmental- and social-value-driven responsible tourism. In addition, this paper discusses the existing sustainability and responsibility nomenclatures and their use and contributes relevant conclusions on the current understanding of sustainability and responsibility in European and UNWTO practices. The term *responsustable tourism* is suggested to join two existing terms and demonstrate that the current understanding of responsible tourism behaviour is based on the concept of sustainable tourism.

1. Introduction

Concern over the natural and social environments has generated research debate on tourism–environment relationship. This debate gained momentum in the early 1970s when George Young argued that the impacts of tourism are both a blessing and a blight (Young, 1973) and Claude Kaspar, a Swiss-based tourism researcher, called for a new "dimension of [the] tourism debate" (Kaspar, 1973, p. 139), which he termed *environmental ecology*. Later, Swiss ecologist Jost Krippendorf (1984) challenged the sense of mass tourism in his book entitled "Vacation People" ("Ferienmenshen" in German, translated as "Holiday Makers" in English (Krippendorf, 1987)) and began the search for alternatives. Tourism critics in the 1980s called for "… more responsibility for the effects of travel and behaviour on host environments, both physical and human" (Butler, 1995, p. 5). This interest in "more responsibility" led to so-called alternative tourism forms and concepts which have been given many names, such as alternative, soft, quality, eco, responsible, minimum impact tourism, green and ethical tourism, with all of them representing an alternative to the mainstream mass tourism that has been becoming environmentally, socially, ethically and politically intolerable (Mihalič, 2006; Swarbrooke, 1999). In general, global environmental concern culminated in "Our Common Future", as defined in the Brundtland report (WCED, 1987), which brought the global environmental debate and the notion of sustainability to the forefront of global and local social and political thinking and agendas. The tourism sustainability debate, e.g., the debate regarding use of the term *sustainability*, following the "Our Common Future" legacy began in the early 1990s with Edward Inskeep (1991) who defined five main criteria for *sustainable tourism*, which addressed the economic, environmental and social responsibility of tourism as well as its responsibility towards tourists (visitor satisfaction) and global justice and equity. Some of his criteria received little recognition in the following debate, which also originated in the Brundtland legacy and culminated in the next decade. The United Nations' organisations, including the UNWTO, primarily supported the three-pillar (environmental, socio-cultural and economic) concept of sustainable tourism. This concept became the focus of mainstream academic tourism literature and programmes and the input of many tourism strategies and policies, resulting in a recognised global trend towards sustainable tourism development.

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However, sustainable tourism research, documents and actions have recently been increasingly accompanied by the notion of responsible tourism. Examples include the new European document entitled the "Charter for Sustainable and Responsible Tourism" (TSG, 2012), and two recent books called "Responsible Tourism" (Leslie, 2012a) and "Taking Responsibility for Tourism" (Goodwin, 2011).

The trend towards sustainability has been studied and accepted by many researchers. On one hand, the sustainability concept has served for some as a magic wand pointing towards more sustainable, environmentally and socially friendlier tourism developmental models and forms (Ritchie and Crouch, 2000; Swarbrooke, 1999). On the other hand, the concept has been persistently criticised for being flawed and inadequate (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2010). In other words, the sustainability discussion has helped draw attention to the need for a balance between economic and environmental interests in tourism. Its actual penetration into strategies and policies has resulted in many good practices and improvements such as energy savings, recycling, a reduction of waste and emissions and attempts to improve the livelihood of the local population. However, there is also significant evidence of the opposite effect. Wheeler argues that the "intellectually appealing" concept of sustainable tourism has little practical application because it has turned into a public relations tool for addressing the criticism of the impact of tourism while allowing essentially the same behaviour as before (Wheeller, 1993, p.121). Indeed, a consensus on the efficacy of sustainable tourism development remains elusive (Chettiparamb and Kokkranikal, 2012), and its implementation in practice remains difficult, leaving much of the tourism industry "… alarmingly unsustainable" (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2010, p. 117).

Tourism stakeholders are applying sustainability practices at a slow pace. Further, some destinations might inaccurately promote themselves as sustainable and increase the expectations of new tourists (Poon, 1989), who are then confronted with the gap between the actual and promised (advertised) sustainability. Extensive lists of sustainable tourism indicators have been created to measure this gap and actual sustainability (EC, 2014; ECETAT and ECOTRANS, 2004; TSG, 2007; UNWTO, 2004). However, although these lists enable actual progress in sustainability performance to be monitored while some (aside from the three-pillar approach) measure political sustainability and customer satisfaction (EC, 2014; ECETAT & ECOTRANS, 2004), they do not provide a measurement tool that can help destinations understand the overall transition process regarding sustainability and responsibility. For this reason, a tool to understand, measure and monitor the process of implementing sustainability is still needed. This is the primary purpose of this paper.

The existence of this paper has been provoked by two interrelated facets of the above debate. The first relates to the never-ending search for new tourism terms on the assumption that a new term will bring *more responsible tourism*. In this context, interest has been triggered by the recently growing popularity of the term *responsible tourism* in the tourism literature (Goodwin, 2011) as well as in consulting and political and business practices (TSG, 2012). The actual and academic coexistence of these two key terms can also be well illustrated by the titles of scientific conferences discussing sustainable-responsible tourism development. For example, in early October 2013, on the same days, two conferences were held on the issue, one in Istanbul, Turkey and the other in Barcelona, Spain. The first conference tried to attract participants through the conference title "sustainability" (International conference: Sustainability issues and Challenges in Tourism, 2013), the other by discussing "responsible tourism" (RTD7 Conference: Responsible Tourism in Destinations. Barcelona – Catalunya, 2013). Questions arise as to what does responsible tourism bring to the tourism debate in terms of terminology, concept and tourism type, and how does it relate to sustainable tourism.

The second facet relates to the gap between the appealing conceptual idea of sustainable tourism and its alarmingly slow penetration of action and practice, which is obviously connected to *tourism irresponsibility* or irresponsible tourism behaviour. In the context of both facets, this paper is interested in the penetration of sustainability and responsibility in the tourism industry and destination practices. Being a conceptual paper, its aim is to integrate existing theoretical and practical understandings and uses of the notions of sustainable and responsible tourism and provide new theoretical perspectives for their well-reasoned and coherent understanding. It examines the theories on the causes of environmental damage and the transition of society to a state in which environmental issues can no longer be ignored, as outlined by the Swiss welfare economist Bruno Frey (1985). His theory is applied to tourism to increase the understanding of the sustainable-responsible tourism discourse and current developments in use of the terms sustainable and responsible tourism. The increased use of the term *responsible tourism* is discussed, and an attempt to connect it with *sustainable tourism* is made. Paradoxically, the criticism of the above-mentioned never-ending renaming of tourism has led to a new tourism term. The term *responsustable tourism* has been suggested, not to offer a new tourism type or concept but as an attempt to join two existing terms to properly articulate the current *responsible tourism* debate, which is based on the concept of *sustainable tourism*.

In order to follow the primary purpose of this study, there are three specific aims: first, to understand the notions of responsible and sustainable tourism in a historical, theoretical and practical context; second, to provide a logical model to accommodate the above understandings; and third, to develop a tool to allow actual understanding and implementation of the sustainable tourism concept in a (responsible) destination.

Accordingly, the section "Introduction" explains the relevance and importance of the study. The next section explains the nature of the paper and the methodology applied. The state of the art on the sustainable-responsible tourism discourse is then presented and theoretical and practical evidence of its existence is given. Based on this discourse, the next section provides a model for responsustable tourism. Results and a discussion of the current and a proposed understanding of the sustainable-responsible tourism discourse follows, while the paper finishes with a section outlining conclusions and further research.

2. Methodology

In line with the standards for conceptual or review articles (Watts, 2011), this paper attempts to further expand and refine the understanding of the sustainable-responsible tourism discourse and suggests how to close the sustainable-responsible gap by using clear definition of each term, derived from theories on environmental damage and behavioural economics.

However, although primarily a conceptual paper, the paper's construction is informed by some explorative methods in theorising and conducting research. In this context, the paper applies engaged scholarship and action research methodology.

Engaged scholarship research emphasises advances in scientific and practical knowledge (Van de Ven, 2007) which fits the theoretical and practical nature of the present research. Being based on ongoing research and academic thinking on sustainable and responsible tourism development, this research engages academic knowledge. Further, by deriving from the current practices in

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strategy and policy formulation and the implementation of sustainable and/or responsible tourism, it engages with reality. Both are iterated to fit the proposed model.

In addition, the paper employs an action research methodology. Zuber-Skerritt (1996) suggests that the aim of any action research project is to bring about the practical improvement or development of social practice, and practitioners' better understanding of their practices. A key feature of this action research approach is that it involves the investigation being undertaken by the person directly concerned with the social situation under consideration (McGugan, 2002), here derived from the researcher's experience with academic research and the creation and implementation of national and European sustainable tourism strategies and policies. It means that this methodology not only focuses on the transfer of knowledge and dissemination for the purpose of adding to the existing body of tourism knowledge but, most importantly, critical thinking about this knowledge and the co-creation of new knowledge are enhanced by learning from both sides (academic and practical), whether through academic papers, conferences or work experience with the tourism industry and public and private sector in designing sustainable tourism development strategies, agendas and monitoring the implementation process.

The sustainable-responsible tourism discourse is brought to a close by the proposed Triple-A Model which joins sustainable and responsible tourism to form responsustable tourism. Some metaphoric examples of climbing a mountain are used by way of inspiration to interpret, visualise and concretise the theoretical model, its phases and penetration processes. The result of this conceptual thinking is jointly summarised in the section entitled *Framework for understanding the sustainable-responsible discourse* which fully illustrates how to shape that discourse.

3. The sustainable-responsible tourism discourse

In one study, Higgins Desbiolles (2010) claimed that a dominant issue in the current tourism discourse is the elusiveness of achieving sustainability. Although she argues that the sustainability concept is not adequate, the discourse she refers to actually relates to the low application of sustainability principles in the tourism industry, which "… remains alarmingly unsustainable" (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2010, p. 117). For much of the tourism industry, overall sustainability practices seem as distant as the mighty Mount Everest seems to mountain climbers. Nevertheless, Everest is on almost every professional climber's dream agenda and, although many alpinists have conquered it so far, the majority of mountain climbers have not yet – and never will – reach even its base camp for a wide variety of reasons. In this context, this paper further expands the tourism discourse by distinguishing between dream and reality agendas and actions, e.g., between sustainable and responsible tourism, which is observed as a discourse between the concept and its actual application.

Thus, the first theme of this section is sustainability as a concept. Tourism researchers (Bramwell and Lane, 1993) have traced the theoretical origins of sustainable tourism back to a publication in 1973 (Dasmann et al., 1973) and its political penetration in 1980 in the World Conservation Strategy (IUCN, 1980). As already pointed out in the "Introduction" section of this paper, the drive towards sustainable tourism has been prompted by concerns about the tourism–environment relationship as well as interest in developing concepts that might help bring this relationship more in line with the ideology of "Our Common Future" (WCED, 1987). The debate is focused on the new developmental principles based on the concept termed *sustainability*. It is beyond dispute that sustainable tourism development has been widely recognised as a *concept*, meaning "… tourism that is based on the principles of sustainable development" (UNEP & WTO, 2005, p. 11). These principles, also known as the three pillars, demand consistency with economic as well as socio-cultural and environmental objectives and enable tourism operations to remain competitive in the long run. In this context, some academics refer to economic, socio-cultural and environmental sustainability. However, feeling that it is potentially critical for the acceptability of any solution, some critics tried to integrate a fourth dimension – political sustainability (Ritchie and Crouch, 2000). Yet since it was impossible to define this political dimension as the fourth pillar, because – unlike the economic, socio-cultural and environmental pillars – it does not relate directly to the impacts of tourism, the fourth pillar of the sustainability concept has never materialised. However, parallel to this debate, some addressed the political dimension through a debate on three requirements that must be satisfied to make tourism sustainable (Fig. 1). First, sustainable tourism is based on an awareness of sustainability and ethics, supported by environmental education and information for all stakeholders on both the demand and supply sides. Second, it also relates to the above-mentioned political dimension as it requires the informed participation of all relevant destination stakeholders, a consensus, a critical mass and strong political leadership to enable its implementation. Third, sustainable tourism should maintain a high level of tourist satisfaction, thereby meeting market needs (Mihalič, 2013; UNWTO, 2004). More specifically, in existing market economies the latter also assumes a willingness to pay for sustainability.

The three-pillar concept has inspired most sustainability research and penetrated numerous strategy and policy documents in the real tourism sector. However, the question remains: to what extent do sustainability principles improve the sustainability of the real tourism sector?

Notably, the tourism sustainability debate has focused on the destination level rather than the micro-level of the firm (Dwyer, 2005). Empirical evidence from the hospitality industry has shown that economic performance is the highest priority, while environmental performance is the lowest priority (Blackstock et al., 2008; Bohdanowicz et al., 2005; Bramwell et al., 2008; Mihalič et al., 2012). It appears that tolerating and accepting sustainability agendas has been easier for public stakeholders than for private stakeholders, especially corporate businesses since they traditionally focus on economic goals. More specifically, firms have been much slower to discuss or address the environmental and socio-cultural aspects of their business practices and reluctant to talk

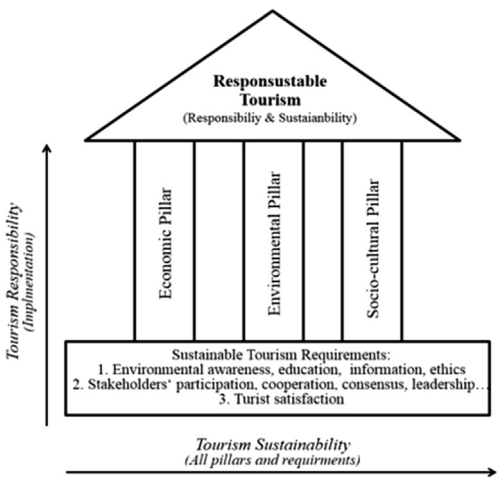

Fig. 1. Proposed understanding of responsustable tourism (based on the three pillars and three requirements).

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about *sustainability*. However, other sustainability-coloured concepts such as the *triple bottom line* (TBL) or *corporate social responsibility* (CRS) seem to be closer to the business world. Reluctance to talk about sustainability has also lead to the use of notion *green tourism*, as a synonym.

Therefore, the second theme of this section involves identifying why companies have accepted CSR models more widely. To understand how firms perceive responsibility, two alternative lines of thought known as the customer and broader stakeholder orientations of the firm are relevant (Heikkurinen and Bonnedahl, 2013). According to first line of thought, the firm is market-oriented and "its social responsibility … is to increase its profits" (Friedman, 1962, citied in van Marrewijk, 2003, p. 97). Profit is the focal point of the company, while social responsibility and actions lie in the domain of the government. In this regard, companies are interested in CSR behaviour only to the extent that it contributes to the business goal, which is ultimately driven by profit motives (Chettiparamb and Kokkranikal, 2012). This market-oriented view can be demonstrated by the argument frequently used by the tourism industry to counter larger environmental pro-activeness. Firms often claim that low consumer demand and low willingness to pay extra for environmentally friendlier products and responsible tourism practices is an insufficient incentive to improve environmental performance (Budeanu, 2005). Market orientation explicitly focuses on the creation of superior value for buyers and thus superior performance for the business and distinguishes between economic responsibilities and other responsibilities such as legal and ethical responsibilities. It prioritises economic utility, not sustainable development (Heikkurinen and Bonnedahl, 2013).

The alternative line of argument regarding a company's behaviour is its modern form which targets all three sustainability pillars, more often called business lines: the economic, environmental (e.g., natural) and social lines. Based on this understanding, CSR is now understood as a business' contribution to corporate sustainability (van Marrewijk, 2003). This corporate understanding corresponds to the societal approach to CSR which recognises that companies are an integral part of society and thus responsible to society as a whole. It assumes that the company considers a broader set of stakeholders (not only its customers) in its behaviour. The ethical behaviour of a firm reflects the concerns of its consumers, employees, shareholders and the community (Caroll, 1991). The stakeholder orientation focuses on the broader responsibility of a firm through its stakeholders who affect the business, thus incorporating all three sustainability pillars. It does not draw a strict line between the firm's economic responsibilities and other responsibilities like ethical responsibilities.

Further, the firm's reluctance to talk about sustainability is illustrated by another practice example of John Elkington who started his UK-based private consulting company, SustAinable. He invented a new terminology to sell sustainability business practices to corporate and private business. He named this new approach the *triple bottom line* (TBL) (Elkington, 1997). The TBL is just another way of wording the three pillars of sustainability, yet it is more strongly accepted by corporate stakeholders. The TBL concept has penetrated some of the tourism debate, but much less so than the sustainability concept.

A similar argument can be made for the notion of *green tourism* which organisations have in many cases used as a synonym for sustainable tourism. More specifically, the British Green Tourism Business Scheme claims "Green tourism is sustainable tourism …" (GT, 2014). The same sentiment can be found on the web pages of other national tourism organisations as the term green tourism is often more accepted by different stakeholder groups than that of sustainable tourism (Forquan et al., 2010; STO, 2013). For example, after trying to promote sustainable tourism for many years with a very limited response from tourism business sector, Slovenian national tourism organisation strategically introduced *green tourism* as a synonym for sustainable tourism in 2009 and succeed to mobilise diverse tourism stakeholders to join the efforts under the slogan "Slovenia is green, Slovenia acts green, Slovenia promotes green" (Mihalič, 2013; STO, 2013), targeting all three sustainability pillars.

From a modern perspective, the debate on the differences between sustainable, CSR, TBL or green tourism seems unproductive because all converge and relate to the same pillars. However, from the aspect of business and global market reality, which delineates the roles of business, governments and civil society, the separated classical shareholders business approach still needs attention. The CSR or TBL notion seems to be more strongly rooted in the world of business corporations, and the notion of sustainability in the public sector and sustainable tourism destination development. This fact alone might be evidence of the gap between the differences presented above between an orientation towards shareholder profit and one towards wider societal responsibility and is supported in the context of the above separation.

Although there is some evidence that responsibility concepts in from of CSR models are applied to private and public sector tourism practice, the notion of responsible tourism has evolved separately. It has been present in tourism in some form since the early 1980s and is connected to many studies on environmental problems in tourism (Bramwell et al., 2008; Butler, 1995; Chettiparamb and Kokkranikal, 2012; Goodwin, 2011; Leslie, 2012b, 2012c). Contrary to the relative consensus on the three-pillar meaning of sustainable tourism, observed as a concept, the notion of responsible tourism (or CSR) has not been as strongly established or as frequently applied.

According to some authors, responsibility and responsible tourism can mean "anything" (Chettiparamb and Kokkranikal, 2012, p. 302; van Marrewijk, 2003), and its use adds nothing to the conceptual understanding of tourism. The existing literature and documents on responsible tourism reveal many understandings that: vary regarding whether the subject is the concept, theory or practice (Leslie, 2012a, b, c); involve different stakeholders and different aims; refer to social or polar tourism (ICRT, 2011); or create environmentally friendlier tourism or better places for people to live and visit (RTP, 2002). Further, the existing literature focuses on responsible consumption or production (Budeanu, 2005; Stanford, 2008), explores actor relations such as the tourist-host population, and questions individual versus social responsibility as well as the political assumptions and governance models behind the responsibility (Bramwell et al., 2008; Hall, 2012).

In addition to these quite diverse research interests, it seems that the use of *responsible tourism* often occurs when Krippendorf's legacy (1987) of a new understanding of tourism is emphasised (Bramwell et al., 2008; Goodwin, 2011) and when questions of ethical and moral responsibility are brought to the fore (Blackstock et al., 2008; Bramwell et al., 2008; Fennell, 2006). Moreover, it occurs when the *responsibility* of tourism needs to be stressed as some implementation difficulties have been identified and a sustainability agenda is being created. In this regard, we claim that the notion of *responsibility* relates to responsible *behaviour and action*.

This behaviour- or action-based view of responsible tourism has been supported by the work of many researchers. The guru of the responsible tourism movement, Harold Goodwin (2011), claims that:

> "The idea of Responsible Tourism has at its core the imperative to take responsibility, to take action; consumers, suppliers and governments all have responsibilities. The ambition of

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> Responsible tourism is to address the impacts of mainstream tourism, to enhance the positive and to reduce the negative … (p. 2) …. *Responsible Tourism is about everyone involved taking responsibility for making tourism more sustainable"* (p. 31).

Goodwin clearly links responsible tourism to action in favour of making tourism more sustainable. His understanding of the concept of responsibility assumes three aspects: accountability, capacity to act, and the capacity to respond. It is the third aspect, response-ability that directly addresses tourism behaviour and involves entering into a dialogue, creating solutions and acting to make tourism more sustainable.

This behaviour-based view has also been supported by David Leslie (2012b). In his meaningfully titled book chapter, "The Responsible Tourism Debate", he argues that responsible tourism is *"a behavioural trait … based on the basic principles of respect for others and their environment…"* (p. 20).

This view of responsible tourism enabled Leslie to go further and note that responsible tourism assumes "acting responsibly in terms of one's own actions, and moreover, in the management and operation of business" (p. 20). When faced with the dilemma of a conceptual basis for judging responsibility, he refers to the ethical and environmental criticisms of tourism and suggests behaving "… environmentally and/or ethically responsible" (p. 20).

A step further has been taken in the research by Chettiparamb and Kokkranikal (2012), meaningfully entitled "Responsible Tourism and Sustainability". The authors also conceive of responsible tourism as behaviour-based and argue that the notion is linked to sustainability initiatives, which gives a solid conceptual substance to their understanding of responsible tourism. In their research, they progress to the CSR concept and discuss a tourism-specific manifestation of the private sector CSR agenda, which focuses on "… *facilitating responsible behaviour … through CSR-related practices targeting wider socio-economic issues"* (Chettiparamb and Kokkranikal, 2012, p. 307).

Facilitating responsible behaviour creates many questions. There are questions of whether the environmental concern of the tourism industry results in more responsible behaviour and which practical measures and policies encourage and enable greater responsibility (Bramwell et al., 2008; Goodwin and Francis, 2003). Another important question is who the relevant actors are, who should make the relevant choices and what type of philosophy and motivation underpins the responsible tourism paradigm (Fennell and Malloy, 2007). They are all relevant to our tourism discourse as each adds a piece of evidence from a different perspective, demonstrating the discourse's complexity and differentiation, demanding that fragmented issues be placed within a common framework.

Further, many action-based tourism documents can be listed to illustrate the more practice-based use of the notion of responsible tourism. Although the term responsible tourism appeared in many older documents, the first declaration on responsible tourism was published in 2002 ("Cape Town Declaration on Responsible Tourism," 2002). In 2012, the UNWTO Ethics Committee decided to introduce and apply the term *responsible tourism* as part of the new logo for the "Global Code of Ethics for Tourism" (Diotallevi, 2013). Strongly focusing on sustainable development and adopted at the WTO General Assembly in 1999, the Code was given a new cover page and the subtitle "For Responsible Tourism". It is also expected that the UNWTO Secretariat and Committee will work on proposing an official definition of responsible tourism (Diotallevi, 2013).

In addition, the new "European Charter for Sustainable and Responsible Tourism" (TSG, 2012) supports our argument. The charter is built on an old Tourism Sustainability Group (TSG) document (TSG, 2007) which dealt exclusively with the notion of sustainable tourism ("Action for More Sustainable European Tourism"). However, five years later, the new document uses the terms sustainable and responsible tourism but omits the word action. "Action" is now incorporated in the broader understanding of the notion of responsible tourism, as the latter is defined as:

> awareness, decisions and actions of all those involved in the planning, delivery and consumption of tourism, so that it is sustainable over time (TSG, 2012: 2).

Bearing this definition and the above discussion in mind, responsible tourism is not a synonym for sustainable tourism. Responsible tourism addresses the aforementioned sustainable tourism discourse in implementation and is more of an expression to describe tourism that is sustainable because it acts sustainably. It is nothing new, neither a new alternative to other tourism forms nor a new way of "doing" sustainable tourism, as some authors claim (Blackstock et al., 2008, p. 279). Thus, responsible tourism builds on appropriate sustainability-based strategies and policies and adds appropriate behaviour, meaning sustainable (re)actions or, according to Goodwin's concept, response-ability, underpinned by tourism environmental awareness and ethics (Fennell, 2006). This sustainability–responsibility connection is illustrated in Fig. 1 in which the pillars of sustainable development stand upon the sustainable tourism requirements previously presented in the section of the paper on the "Sustainable-responsible Tourism Discourse". Indeed, the roof of the Fig. 1 structure should be termed *responsustable tourism*, demonstrating both responsibility and sustainability in tourism behaviour.

Of course, to answer the question regarding to what extent sustainability principles have improved the real tourism sector's responsustability, tourism sustainability indicators might be of assistance. In tourism research and applied practice, many models can be found, and their use is quite popular. Indeed, sustainable tourism indicators can be observed as tourism responsibility measures and monitoring that support environmentally friendlier tourism management and practice (Blackstock et al., 2008). However, the sustainability indicator schemes are very heavily measurement- and thereby result-oriented, and the majority fail to understand that achieving sustainability in a sector should be understood as a social transformation process and that old sustainability indicator vocabulary might not be sufficient at this point in time. This paper attempts to add to this perspective.

4. Modelling responsustable tourism

4.1. Environmental damage theories

Returning to our initial discussion, which addressed our concern about environmental damage and tourism, the question of the occurrence of environmental damage becomes relevant. Many researchers have tried to explain why "Our Common Future" awareness is not incorporated into our current behaviour. According to these scholars, the answer is threefold (Frey, 1985; Mihalič and Kaspar, 1996). Environmentally improper behaviour is first observed as a result of the non-functionality of the global laissez-fair capitalism market system and as related to the problems of public goods, property rights and externalities. Second, the same problem can be explained based on economic and population growth, which results in overproduction and the overconsumption of resources. The final explanation blames improper behaviour based on human ignorance and/or the absence of environmental awareness and ethics.

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All of the above theories are relevant to our discourse. Regarding the first theory, the environmental goods are wrongly treated as a public goods, as they don't have an owner, are assumed to be plenty and are non-excludable in their consumption. Consequently, these goods are used (and overused and polluted) freely regardless of a user's participation in the related costs. Theory sees the problem in environmental goods, being external to the market allocation mechanism which has the ability to determine the price, through the confrontation of demand (willingness to pay) and supply (willingness to sell). Thus environmental, e.g. external goods must be internalised to our current neo-liberal market allocation system in order to be properly allocated. In theory, such a system would guarantee the socially optimal consumption and use of environmental goods. However, a lead tourism researcher in the criticism of market-led tourism systems, Freya Higgins-Desbiolles (2006, 2008, 2010), argues that the current system of market-based neoliberalism and its culture and ideology of consumerism are inherently unsustainable and calls for a less damaging system that will enable tourism to be a positive developmental social force. Instead of a private-sector commercial profit-driven corporatized tourism paradigm, she suggests an alternative paradigm based on equity, justice and sustainability that is civil-society- and government-driven.

The second theory on environmental damage, which addresses the questions of population and economic growth, is relevant to tourism due to tourism demand and supply growth. It is ever present in the tourism literature and is referred to in almost every work that relates to tourism development and business. This is the debate on sea, sun and sand mass tourism and its seasonal concentration (Aguiló et al., 2005; Figini and Vici, 2012; Fink, 1970; Mihalič, 2006; Poon, 1993), which has often been observed as a dominant cause of the current sustainability tourism discourse. In this regard, non-mass-tourism developmental models, e.g., alternative tourism, are called for. At the same time, it is argued that because sustainable tourism is a set of principles, not a type of tourism, it can be applied to any tourism type or destination type, including concentrated mass tourism destinations (UNEP & WTO, 2005).

However, it is the third theory on the occurrence of environmental damage that is the most relevant to this paper. Why does tourism not behave responsibly towards Our Common Future, and why does it not develop and function in a sustainable way? On one hand, tourism businesses that are only driven by profit motives and ignore environmental and social awareness, ethics and policy in terms of strategy-based actions will necessarily face a sustainability discourse. However, on the other hand, economic business thinking is based on rationality and economic values and perceives ethical demands for ecology and justice as irrational. Based on this argument, the theory claims that the absence of so-called social environmental ethics has caused the current negative attitude to our environment (Frey, 1985). In this regard, the existence of environmental damage is explained through the absence of environmental social ethics (and awareness) and as a product of human ignorance. Thus, application of this theory calls for increased environmental awareness and ethics. It should, however, be noted that the theory assumes that people are good by nature and that a proper course of action is followed once they have enough information and knowledge on proper and just behaviour, regardless of the current economic allocation system in place.

4.2. Social stages of responsible behaviour

The information, knowledge, awareness and ethical aspects have been further addressed by the model of the penetration of environmental awareness into society and its policy. To explain how these aspects are addressed, we can turn to political economy. The Swiss-born welfare economist Bruno Frey (1985) proposed the famous four-stage scheme for new environmental trends: *Stage 1: pre-environmental-protection thinking* (society is simply unaware of environmental problems); *Stage 2: awareness of environmental harm* (which explodes after a society can no longer deny the facts); *Stage 3: discussion about environmental policy* (with the intention to mobilise for proper action); and *Stage 4: implementation of environmental policy* (which involves carrying out the appropriate action and assumes proper results).

In the continuation, Frey discussed the above scheme in relation to different stakeholders such as the voters, government, bureaucracy and producers (Frey, 1992). Although this is also highly relevant to our tourism-related debate, this paper only focuses on the application of Frey's model to the tourism sustainability discourse.

4.3. The Triple-A Model on sustainable-responsible tourism: towards responsustable tourism

One can easily apply the same four phases to the way our tourism stakeholders address environmental concern and sustainability. The idea of Frey's social stages was first applied to the tourism field by Mihalič and Kaspar (1996). Here the original four stages were reinvented and renamed. The first stage is the so-called *ignorance* stage that occurs before the destination considers environmental problems. Tourism stakeholders are unaware of such problems and thus express no concern at all; other, non-environmental sets of values determine their behaviour. As this phase acts somewhat as the pre-history of our sustainability discourse, the next stage is more relevant. This is a stage of environmental *awareness*, as exemplified by exposure to information on tourism environmental impacts and relationships that have made destinations sufficiently aware of tourism impacts that they can no longer be denied. Since tourism environmental concern, our starting point, is deeply connected with the current sustainable tourism ideology, sustainability issues inevitably enter the destination and create and shape so-called tourism sustainability awareness. The next stage involves the conceptual inclusion of sustainability issues, as defined above, because these become a matter of debate and are transferred into goals, coded into the destination's strategy and placed on its *agenda*. To shape and form the willingness to act consistently with the sustainability concept, the discussion of relevant policy instruments begins. Finally, the social-sustainability ethics and the need to act to achieve the strategic goals drive this process toward and into the last stage, which is the successful implementation of a sustainability policy and, hence, the stage of implementing sustainable *action*, thereby manifesting environmental responsibility. The destination, e.g., its stakeholders, behave in a sustainable manner, thus meeting the objectives and standards for sustainable development, business, products, etc.

The crucial words here are *Awareness–Agenda–Action*, all starting with the letter "A" and thus creating our Triple-A Model. Henceforth, we refer to this model as our Triple-A Model, which is presented and explained in Fig. 2.

Fig. 2 presents the top three stages of Frey's model after environmental concern has entered society. The pyramidal form associates the sustainability–responsibility process with mountain climbing. To reach the top of a mountain, a mountain climber needs to start at the bottom. He knows that the stepwise passage through the lower mountain station is a precondition for reaching the higher levels and that each climbing expedition up needs to be supported by a base station below. Thus, the narrowing shape of the pyramid suggests that each previous stage is a base upon which the next stage is dependent. The vertical and horizontal arrows also

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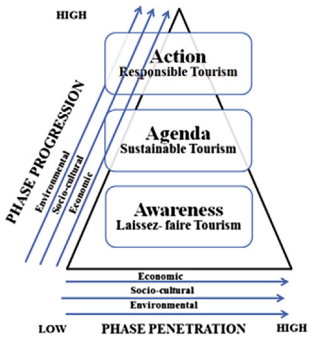

Fig. 2. The Triple-A Model – for responsustable tourism.

demonstrate that the penetration of sustainability into a destination is a twofold process. First, the process moves stepwise because the destination has to pass through different phases – from the starting phase of the destination's awareness, through the agenda stage to achieve the implementation action phase at the top of the pyramid. This process is demonstrated by the vertical progression line. Second, the process is continuous because the destination may proceed to the next phase before the previous phase has fully matured. More specifically, the top stage might be reached by only a few of the mountain expedition's climbers; the rest might stay in lower base stations and climb up later or not at all. This characteristic is presented by a horizontal arrow line that measures the penetration into each stage. Theoretically, a destination and its tourism stakeholders might find themselves at any of the stages on the sustainability–responsibility progression and penetration scale. At the same time, the destination might reach the top phase without having fully developed the characteristics of the previous phases, thus simultaneously positioning its stakeholders in all phases.

The challenge of our pyramid is that it is based on a three-pillar sustainability understanding and thus reflects awareness, agenda and action in three different areas: economic, environmental and socio-cultural. This is illustrated by the three penetration and progression arrows in Fig. 2. In fact, the pyramid in Fig. 2 is the sum of three different pyramids and can be broken down into those three, one for each pillar. Tourism stakeholders might be at different positions in terms of both progression and penetration in each of the three pyramids. The existing global market system prioritises progression in the economic pillar pyramid; for some stakeholders, the other two pyramids (environmental and social) might become less important, thus affecting the triple sustainability of the complete pyramid. For example, one hotel study that measured firm behaviour with regard to the presence of different strategies showed that most of the surveyed hotels have an economic strategy in place (reported for 80% of firms) and only 35% of firms confirmed they had an all-pillars sustainable development strategy (Mihalič et al., 2012).

In reality, many destinations and tourism businesses do not know exactly where on this pyramidal scale they are and how sufficiently or insufficiently they have developed each of the phases. For example, a destination or firm might be well informed about the occurrence of environmental damage and be aware of environmental problems but might lack the appropriate information and knowledge on how to respond to those problems. The greater the information gap, the further to the left it will be positioned on the phase penetration scale. Some destinations or firms might have recently discussed sustainability agendas and created partnerships to adopt one, while others might have already included sustainability in a strategy and are confronted with policy-efficacy or implementation problems because a destination's stakeholder behaviour might lag behind the declared sustainability goals, meaning that the critical mass has not conquered the apex of the sustainability mountain.

5. Results and discussion: a framework for understanding the sustainable-responsible tourism discourse

Table 1 links our understanding of responsustable tourism presented in Fig. 1 with our Triple-A Model presented in Fig. 2. Further, it demonstrates how the whole process is driven by visitor satisfaction and their will to pay for sustainability, an ultimate measure and driver of a destination's success.

Column 4 of Table 1 employs the term *environmental laissez-faire tourism* to describe a tourism realm that is free of any environmentally based interference, including values, enabling its system to operate according to economic rules and only one (economic) business line. Tourism is free of any environmental demands or standards, such as legal interventions, public policy, voluntary environmental actions or social mobilisation and other non-economic instruments and demands. As long as tourism is only based on the sustainable tourism concept, the sector still behaves in much the same way as before. Practically speaking, responsible tourism behaviour only begins in the third stage of our tourism model, when a sustainability-based agenda for responsible tourism starts to be implemented.

One may argue that this paper is dwelling on old findings because the concept-action tourism discourse has been present in the sustainability debate for quite some time. For example, the original Brundtland Report offered "… the recommendations for a sustainable course of development" (WCED, 1987: 16). Indeed, the Agenda 21 approach used to be quite popular, referring to a blueprint for action for more sustainable real tourism. However, this approach has not reduced our sustainability discourse because *agenda* is our final Alpine base camp and thus serves as the second A in our Triple-A Model. *Agenda* is a precondition for our mountain climber to start their journey to the peak of the mountain, to start the implementation action phase. Agenda extends a theoretical sustainability concept into a concept with specifically defined actions, meaning that it codifies the sustainability principles into a strategy and policy and offers policy instruments. Thus, tourism that enters the implementation action stage needs a new name. Based on the proper action or responsible actual behaviour, the term *responsible tourism* would be appropriate. This interpretation argues that responsible tourism is not a new tourism concept and especially not an alternative concept to sustainable tourism. It simply refers to acting responsibly and in line with sustainability values. Thus, responsible tourism is a result of the transition towards actual tourism based on more sustainable values.

The Triple-A Model pyramidal view of the progression from environmentally laissez-faire tourism towards responsible and thus more sustainable tourism integrates new parts that have developed within the tourism environmental and sustainability debate. It demonstrates an increase in the interconnectedness and complexity of the debate, integrating its stages, which include and transcend the previous ones. However, vertical and horizontal progression up our Awareness–Agenda–Action pyramid is not guaranteed or self-evident; however, as time progresses, it cannot be stopped. For example, the awareness- and ethics-driven transition towards responsible tourism might be slowed down for many reasons. One study found that European tour operators have a high level of awareness about tourism's negative impacts and recognised their responsibility to reduce them. Nevertheless, facing low customer demand for responsible tourism practices and having little regulatory pressure to behave in a more environmentally

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Table 1
A framework for understanding the sustainable-responsible tourism discourse.

Frey's model	Responsustable tourism pillars and requirements (Fig. 1)	The Triple-A Model (Fig. 2)	Stage-related tourism concept	Description
1	2	**3**	4	5
4. Implementation of environmental policy	Stakeholders' participation, cooperation, consensus, leadership, action & Visitor satisfaction	**3. Action**	Responsible tourism behaviour	The process of engaging in actual behaviour to achieve a full set of sustainability aims (responsible behaviour), taking actions in line with all three pillars of the sustainability concept, implementation of the agenda.
3. Discussion of environmental policy	Economic and/or Environmental and/or socio-cultural pillar & Visitor satisfaction	**2. Agenda**	Sustainable tourism concept	A blueprint for action for more sustainable tourism. The agenda is based on a sustainable tourism strategy and informed by sustainability value sets that demand action to implement the sustainable tourism concept. Economic considerations are extended to environmental and socio-cultural aspects. All are observed as important pillars.
2. Awareness of environmental harm	Tourism environmental awareness, education, information, ethics & Visitor satisfaction	**1. Awareness**	Environmentally laissez-faire tourism	Despite growing concern about tourism and its effects on the social, cultural and natural environment, the tourism sector is fully led by market rules, transactions among private parties are free from all non-economic considerations.
1. Pre-environmental-protection thinking		Ignorance*(Not presented in our Tripple-A Model in Fig. 1)*	Environmentally laissez-faire tourism	A pre-historic stage of our sustainable-responsible tourism discourse, the tourism sector is unaware of socio-cultural and environmental tourism issues.

friendly manner, tour operators engage in few concrete activities and these remain superficial relative to their potential due to their central distribution role and capability to direct customers to suppliers and destinations (Budeanu, 2005; Sigala, 2008). However, tour operators are financing sustainability and environmental research and customer education activities, which will straighten the vertical position of tourism in our awareness stage and allow more stakeholders to progress to the next stage in the pyramid where more activities will be demanded and designed in both the private and public sectors. This case clearly demonstrates the shareholder market-led approach to corporate sustainability. However, ignoring the progression in time might be dangerous as standards for environmental behaviour are nevertheless changing due to the above-mentioned processes. In other words, behaviour is changing because "… the way the world is going, the companies are having to become more responsible … it … helps them to remain competitive, so they are going to have to do it" (Miller, 2001, p. 595).

Our Awareness–Agenda–Action understanding of tourism responsibility is in full harmony with the European Commission's latest standing on sustainable versus responsible tourism (Mihalič, 2011), which demands "… *awareness, decisions and actions …, so that it is sustainable over time*" (TSG, 2012, p. 2). However, this explains little about the corporate and economic tensions underlying it.

These tensions might be best illustrated by the confrontation of two popular concepts: sustainability versus CSR. In this context, the question of the similarities and differences between sustainability and CSR may arise. This discussion can take place at the conceptual level where both sustainability and CSR are observed as two concepts that converged over time and are now both linked to the same three pillars: economic, social and environmental. However, it is evident that CRS is more popular in the corporate world and sustainability among tourism destinations and public bodies or organisations. One may even claim that the term sustainability has been avoided by corporate business practice and consultants.

We argue here that CSR, which is relevant to the corporate world, operates from the standpoint of corporate values and may add the other two sets of sustainability values, e.g., social and environmental, in a way that makes real business or economic sense. At the profit-driven level of sustainability motivation (market-oriented view), sustainability is narrowly defined inside the business fence and is only promoted if profitable. Quite differently, debate based on sustainable tourism (broader stakeholder orientation) claims that all pillars are equally important, with no priorities given to any pillar and certainly not to the economic one. In this case of a holistic level of sustainability, the motivation for a sustainability orientation is derived from the awareness that all beings and phenomena are mutually interdependent, and universal responsibility towards all other beings is fully recognised (van Marrewijk, 2003). As research has shown, in the laissez-faire environmental tourism phase, tourism managers publicly admit economic but not ecological responsibility, believing that they are a priori contradictory. After society enters the awareness stage, where the connections between the economy, society and ecology become obvious and cannot be ignored, such statements become rare and many managers participate in the discussion on the sustainability agenda. However, the question of how to convince competitive corporations to follow the full set of sustainability values remains unsettled. Ultimately, the idea of sustainability has emerged completely isolated from a thorough analysis of the principles governing market-based economic systems, and the corporate world seems to have a recognised right to acknowledge and protect the importance of economic values and even challenge the other two pillars. In this regard, sustainability seems to live in an isolated world and CSR (if applied) in a so-called green capitalism characterised by "green capitalists" and "green consumers" (Elkington, 1997, pp. ix, x). Quite the contrary, tourism destinations are expected to behave in a sustainable-responsible fashion and a destination's responsibility is broadly defined inside and outside the destination's fence. The question here is whether the all-pillars sustainability position is observed as a threat to businesses and profit-driven sustainability as a legitimate mundus operandi in line with corporate values and practice. The obvious conclusion is that a CRS orientation assumes that tourism can happily live in

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"sustainable capitalism", underpinned by green customers who are demanding more green products and thus more responsible tourism, and are willing to pay for it.

To summarise the above discussion, there are two reasons for the rise of *responsible tourism*. The first is the need to overcome what has become evident, the actual sustainability discourse, due to the inability of sustainable tourism itself to be more strongly implemented in real tourism. The second reason is more ideology-based and refers to an attempt to merge the tourism-based environmental debate with the language used in other sectors, most importantly the corporate or business world, with the aim of increasing the acceptance and attractiveness of the relevant tourism concept among all tourism stakeholders.

6. Conclusions and further research

The low efficacy of *sustainability* in tourism coupled with the increasing attention to the notion of *responsible tourism*, as demonstrated by current theoretical and practical developments, call for critical reflection. The changes in our understanding occur in stages that follow both a logical and a chronological order. More holistic understanding develops later because it has to wait for the emergence of the parts that will then make up a complete theory and interconnections with the new stages including and transcending the previous ones (van Marrewijk, 2003).

In this context, the present conceptual paper integrates and challenges different existing theoretical and practical private and public stakeholder understandings and uses of the notions of responsible and sustainable tourism. It offers a well-reasoned integrated understanding of responsible tourism and the process that leads towards *responsustable tourism*. The proposed Triple-A Model helps to analyse and diagnose the main sustainability tourism discourse on enduring unsustainable tourism practices. The creation of the model was also provoked by the current inconsistency in use of the terms sustainable and responsible tourism and theories on environmental damage and behavioural reaction to tourism damage. As the two developments, theoretical and practical, are relevant to this paper, we focussed our discussion on both.

By putting the sustainability–responsibility discourse into a relevant context of political economics and behavioural economics, this paper adds to tourism concepts and nomenclatures. Although the proposed Triple-A Model and its phases have existed in some form in the tourism debate and while one might argue that they are common sense, they contribute to understanding the process and the reality of the sustainable tourism discourse. This understanding, placed in a real context, brings us to the tourism-responsibility paradox. Although the Awareness-Agenda-Action process theoretically leads towards more socially and environmentally responsible tourism, it is the economic set of interests that is attempting to react and adapt to the growing environmental awareness and demand and is leading the process and promoting the notion of responsible tourism. Here, we refer to our observation that its use is pushed by the 'responsibility' (e.g., in the form of CRS) debate, recognising the need to go green but while strongly protecting the values of the economic pillar. Thus, more research is needed to assess whether the above-mentioned green movement determined by the capitalistic system is in fact leading towards a sufficiently sustainable future.

Further, our model can help increase tourism responsibility by analysing the implementation chances of agendas and environmental policies. To avoid the expectation that the model leads to the implementation (e.g., responsible tourism) phase itself, the model must recognise that potential conflicts among the stakeholder groups are an important element in the political process, enabling progression towards the higher phases. In that regard, the roles of tourists, governments, the tourism industry, NGOs and local populations will also need to be further discussed and researched.

Our model can be applied to tourism destinations of any level, tourism businesses, governments, non-governmental organisations, institutions and tourists. All of these relevant stakeholders have a responsibility to seek to reduce the negative and enhance the positive environmental, socio-cultural and economic impacts of tourism. In this regard, more research is needed from the aspect of each group, focusing on awareness (and ethics) creation, instruments for achieving the goals and behavioural context.

One may extend the understanding of responsible tourism behaviour to all stages of our pyramid. That is, if one understands that the destination is responsible for being aware of tourism damage and minimising it, that responsibility also requires the developing of an action plan. Thus, responsible tourism might refer to all of the stages, not only the last one, as presented in Fig. 2. Indeed, we used the term responsible tourism in a narrower sense, limited to actual behaviour that makes real tourism more sustainable. In our model, we have connected responsible behaviour with the sustainable tourism concept and thus added the sustainability value to the behavioural concept. In this context, another, joint nomination would better describe our top pyramidal tourism phase. Merging the words responsible (behaviour-based) and sustainable (concept and values-based) produces the new term responsustable tourism. It is argued that this new term fully reflects the academic and practical debate and action that is increasingly labelled "responsible" tourism, yet de facto based on sustainability. In this context, paper proposes a Triple-A Model as a tool that helps to understand the process of how a responsible tourism destination or firm actually implements sustainability agenda.

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